So researchers who would prefer to work with non-pathogens may be tempted by the availability of funds to focus on pathogens and submit grant proposals to a biodefence programme.

But this too has financial implications, because dangerous organisms can be investigated only within expensive, high containment facilities. Moreover, there is considerably less existing knowledge to build upon in the case of most pathogens than exists for familiar organisms. Enserink and Kaiser cite as one instance a microbiologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Patricia Kiley is contemplating switching her work on bacterial sensing of oxygen levels from *Escherichia coli,* to a bioterrorism agent. Although tempted to do so in order to 'get a shot at the current US biodefence bonanza', she is likely to make slower progress using an organism whose physiology and genetics are less familiar than one that has been a key microbe in laboratories for decades.

Anthony Fauci insists that the number of NIAID grants for non-defence bacterial physiology projects has remained fairly constant, at 120-150 annually, over the past five years. He concedes that the number may have fallen at the other relevant institute, the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, though this has probably reflected tighter budgets generally.

One of the prime movers behind the microbiologists' letter is Richard Ebright, a Howard Hughes Institute investigator at Rutgers University, New Jersey. He has previously publicly criticised the proliferation of laboratories devoted to pathogens of potential interest to terrorists, because of the risks of accidental or deliberate release. Ebright believes that the same objectives could be achieved by increasing research on related but harmless organisms, and by restricting work on putative biological weapons to a few, strictly controlled centres.

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Hopes rise over Pasteur crisis

The Pasteur Institute in Paris is looking to move on from current problems about its future. **Michael Gross** reports.

Louis Pasteur set up the Institute that bears his name in 1888, in order to scale up the development and use of his vaccine against rabies, and to study the microbial agents of infectious diseases. Built on his pioneering work on microbes and sterile working conditions, the institute flourished and became the seed for a world-wide network of subsidiaries. Within the first century of its history, the institute produced eight Nobel laureates. In recent years, it has made major contributions to the genome sequences of microbes including the tuberculosis pathogen.

The end of the 19th century saw the Pasteur Institute undisputedly at the forefront of microbiology and public health. At the beginning of the 21st century, however, the institute has looked like it could do with some renovation in body and in spirit. When Philippe Kourilsky took office as director general in 2000, he was determined to modernize the institute. Now, in the last year of his six-year tenure, he admits that the institute has run into a crisis which is partly his own responsibility. On March 15, the institute's 'parliament', the assembly of 100, met to install a new council, which will have the task to find a way out of the crisis and possibly a new director.

General discomfort among the researchers — who call themselves 'Pasteuriens' — with working conditions, the funding situation, and the general management style of Kourilsky's leadership had simmered for a few years, when the provisions made for the renovation of the buildings on the main Pasteur campus in central Paris, three kilometers south-east of the Eiffel Tower, brought the discontent to a head.

Two of the buildings are in desperate need of renovation, which has been planned to a five-year schedule and has to be started as soon as possible, as parts of the location are said to be in violation of existing laws concerning workplaces. The crunch point is the Duclaux building on the West side of Dr Roux street, where a total of 255 research staff need to be evacuated to allow the work to start. The management wanted to move the researchers to an industrial site at Fresnes, 10 km south of the city centre, and sent out letters informing researchers of their displacement without individual consultation.

The move to Fresnes was fiercely opposed by most of the researchers concerned, mainly on grounds of poor public transport accessibility and isolation from the facilities in central Paris, which are vital to Pasteur's involvement in public health. The lack of consultation and response to internal assessments that had declared the move unnecessary had further enraged the Pasteuriens. To resolve the conflict, the director of the UK's National Institute for Medical Research, John Skehel, and administrator John Wills were called in for an independent appraisal of the situation. In a detailed report dated February 17th, they confirmed that a 'decanting' of some research staff would be necessary. They suggest, however, that by refurbishing the two wings of the building one after the other, the number of researchers to be displaced at one time could be limited to 150, which could be housed at the nearby 'Biotop' business park. A Pasteurien who prefers not to be named reckons that "after the Skehel report, and given the current climate, the direction has decided to abort Fresnes... The idea now is to move the whole campus to Palaiseau," a science campus 20km south of Paris, which already hosts numerous educational and research establishments. The final decision will be left to the new council.

While the building questions can probably be solved with a bit of

common sense, the money and management issues may be harder to tackle. This part of the crisis dates back to June 2004, when the assembly refused to approve the institute's annual report because of the impending financial troubles. While Pasteur is a private non-profit organisation that uses its income from patents to fund further research, its research is intertwined with the public funding bodies including CNRS and INSERM, and thus it has also been hit by the budget crisis that led to the revolt of the researchers last year (Curr. Biol. (2004) *14*, R1031).

Following open protests outside a council meeting in December, the council collectively resigned in January. Of its 20 members, only the four sent by the government remained. Hence the need to elect 16 new members on March 15.

In order to overcome the crisis and open a new dialogue with his research staff, Kourilsky took the unprecedented step of opening a chat room on the institute's intranet, where researchers could anonymously put their questions and complaints to him.

In the chat, Kourilsky admitted that the institute was undergoing a crisis, which he attributed to lack of understanding between the parties, and for which he assumed shared responsibility. Replying to a question about the loss of trust between management and staff, he said: "I have learned a lot from this crisis. ... Re-establishing the dialogue is very important to me."

The coming weeks will show whether this communications exercise will be enough to win back the trust of the research staff and in particular the newly elected council. This council represents a credible new start for the institute, and the national newspaper *Liberation* headlined the following day that "the tension decreases at the Pasteur Institute".

So the researchers can go back to work to make the institute as successful in the 21st century as it has been in the previous two.

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New head in Vienna

Graham Tebb reports on the appointment of the developmental neurobiologist, Barry Dickson, as the new director of the Institute of Molecular Pathology in the Austrian capital.

The Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP) in Vienna, Austria has recently announced that Barry Dickson will assume the position of Director in January 2006. Dickson will thus follow in the footsteps of Max Birnstiel, the Institute's first Director, and Kim Nasmyth, who will leave to head the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Oxford (see Curr. Biol. *14*, R452–R453). The appointment was made following the recommendation of an international scientific commission headed by Piet Borst of Amsterdam.

Dickson was born in Australia but after completing his university studies in mathematics and in biology he moved to Zurich, Switzerland, where he obtained his doctorate in the group of Ernst Hafen, who was studying the development of the *Drosophila* eye. He then spent a year and a half at the University of California in Berkeley, working with Corey Goodman on the *Drosophila* central nervous system. He continued this work after his return to Zurich in 1996 and two years later he accepted a position as Group Leader at the IMP in Vienna, where he remained until 2003.

During this period Dickson addressed the question of how a few thousand genes can direct the assembly of complex neuronal circuits, such as the human brain. As a model system he continued to use the fruit fly *Drosophila*, which offers a powerful set of genetic tools, and he focused on identifying and characterizing the ligands and receptors that guide axons. The elucidation of the 'Robo code' for axon pathway selection, reported by his and Goodman's groups, represented a genuine breakthrough in developmental biology. Dickson was also able to show that the regulated intracellular trafficking of Robo guidance receptors is responsible for determining which axons extend across the midline of the central nervous system; and more recently he has also characterized an intracellular signalling pathway that links guidance receptors to the growth cone cytoskeleton. Taken together, this research has played a major part in identifying the signals that guide axons, in explaining why various axons differ in their response to these signals, and in showing how the signals guide axons to their final positions.

In 2003 Dickson was appointed Senior Scientist at the Institute for Molecular Biotechnology (IMBA) in Vienna (see Curr. Biol. *13*, R39–R40). He used this short move — the IMBA is immediately adjacent to the IMP and the latter institute still houses Dickson's lab — as an opportunity to rethink the scientific questions he wished to tackle and the result was a complete change in his scientific direction. As he says, after nearly ten years of working on "someone else's problem"

'Honoured': The developmental neurobiologist, Barry Dickson, is crossing town to become the next director of the Institute of Molecular Pathology in Vienna.